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ABSTRACT

This booklet describes the characteristics of 16 Chicago-area schools designated as winners in a 1982-83 contest to develop student character and academic learning. Out of the 80 schools competing, the 25 finalists were reviewed for evidence of school effectiveness and outcomes. Schools were asked to assess students' prosocial activities and the significant rewards and punishments provided to stimulate good conduct in both students and faculty. The winning schools also excelled in the clarity of their purposes and the consequent involvement of the community in their programs. Moreover, the administration and faculty in winning schools worked closely together, and that same cooperation encompassed the school spirit generated by students and faculty. Winning schools also encouraged high standards for all their students, insisting not only that students learn basic skills but that they press on as high as they are able; a wide range of instructional techniques thus came into play. (JW)

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Chicago Area Award Winning Schools 1982-83

Edward A. Wynne

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Chicago

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Award Winning Schools 1982-83

This booklet describes the characteristics of sixteen Chicago area schools designated as winners in a 1982-93 recognition program. The text may help educators reflect on their own schools' activities, and stimulate parents to look more deliberately at their own children's schools.

The recognition program was conducted to identify schools doing an especially good job in developing student character and academic learning. It was open to both public and private elementary and secondary schools. It was sponsored by For Character, Chicago, a non-profit corporation comprised of Chicago area educators, academics and laypersons.* The program used a system of weighting its individual school evaluations, so schools in different environments were assessed by appropriately different criteria.

The program was conducted to emphasize the importance many educators and laypersons attach to student character (as well as academics) as a learning outcome, and to cause other educators to reconsider their own priorities. Operationally, we defined the word "character" in a rather traditional fashion: it is comprised of two components: not hurting others—observing discipline; and going out of one's way to be polite, truthful, and helpful to others. Many of the active elements of good character are evinced through the practice of pro-social conduct—acts of helpfulness.

The program was publicized as both a contest and an occasion for schools to engage in serious self-assessment. It attracted widespread interest. Information letters were mailed out to about 1500 Chicago area schools. One hundred and seventy-five schools requested copies of the eight page self-assessment form that we used to identify and analyze school policies and activities. Eighty schools submitted completed forms to For Character. Twenty-five of these schools were designated as finalists, and submitted additional information and cooperated with site visits. Sixteen of the schools were ultimately designated as winners by our awards committee, which operated independently of the governing board. The names and cateogories of the winners are illustrated on the chart below. The number before each name will be used later in the text, before each descriptive material related to a particular school; the number in parentheses after each name specifies the school's enrollment.

A few general considerations deserve mention. In some categories, there were a number of entrants—for instance, twenty-eight Chicago public elementary schools partcipated. In other categories, there were few—or, sometimes, no—entries. Thus there were no entries by private secular schools, nor from comprehensive Chicago public high schools. In all cases, the awards committee only gave winner honors to conspicuously well-run schools (considering their comparative situations). All finalists, who did not receive winner status, were formally recognized as finalists.

	Elementary	Intermediate	Secondary
Public Suburban	1. Olive (400) (Arlington Heights) 2. Field Crest (510) (Oak Forest)	8. Fairview (250) (Skokie) 9. Nathan Hale (550) (Crestwood)	12. Oak Park-River Forest (3200)
		Spec. Ed.	
Public Chicago	3. Dubois (530)	10. Durso (105)	13. Hirsch (830) (magnet)
	4. Howe (1300)	11. Northside Learning Center (139)	14. Kenwood Academy (2150) (magnet)
Chicago Archdiocese	5. Mt. Carmel (170) 6. St. Anselm (270) 7. St. Ethelreda (430)		15. Leo (330) 16. Mt. Assisi (630)

* The costs of the recognition program were covered by grants from the Ingersoll and Marguerite Eyer Wilbur Foundations.

The winners encompassed an extraordinary variety of schools, whose diversity ranged far beyond the formal categories listed in the above table. The student populations in the "regular" schools ranged from 170 to 3200. Some winners had 95% of their students entitled to free lunches, others had 95% of their students from relatively affluent homes; some winners had all-white student bodies, and some all-black, and many were racially mixed (including Latino students); and some emphasized relatively traditional academic programs, while others were innovative in their approaches.

Our assessment did not rely on statistics about pupil performance on objective tests, such as reading scores. Such measures are not irrelevant to school assessment. But comparisons among schools via test scores must be made very judiciously, since such differences are just as much related to differences in pupil family background as differences in quality of teaching. Theoretically, it is sometimes possible to allow for such family differences, by techniques of statistical weighting. But such weighting can only be applied among limited pools of schools, and is sometimes still problematic. In lieu of such a concern for scores, our board and awards committee have identified a variety of procedures which should be associated with any comparatively academically effective school. Incidentally, our ignorance of the test scores for participating schools does not mean that these schools themselves administratively ignored the matter of pupil testing. Many of the selected schools administered objective tests frequently, used test results as important tools for monitoring students and teachers, and reported school and pupil test results to parents.

For our first year efforts, we believe the breadth of school participation was impressive. Undoubtedly, non-participating schools stayed out for a variety of reasons. Still, it is likely that at least some of them felt they were not potential finalists—even considering the weighting process used in our assessment. We hope we will be able to run our contest again in 1983-84. And, perhaps, at that time, we can attain participation in some of our now void cateogories. Furthermore, we will try and devise some measures of school *improvement*; this will permit the recognition of schools that are not yet at their peak, but are vigorously moving in the right direction.

Several principles have been applied in developing the succeeding school descriptions. One principle is stylistic. All persons referred to by pronouns will be referred to as males—as "he" or "him"—unless the context clearly requires a feminine pronoun. Of course, many of the principals of winning schools are females, and pupils and teachers can be either male or female. But using traditional grammatical conventions will help the clarity of our prose. The next principle is more substantive. There is a good deal of educational research about the characteristics of effective schools. And this research has helped to shape our inquiries. But some of the research findings have been so general as to discourage emulation. For example, we are often told that principals in effective schools are dynamic people—and this sounds sensible. However, it is more important to identify the behavioral characteristics associated with such a scarce virtue. Then, educators can try and recognize their own particular characteristics—and, if appropriate, they can re-organize their own priorities.

A key aim of our descriptions is to identify policies and characteristics which, hopefully, can be adopted by others. To encourage such adoption, our descriptions do not separately portray individual winners. Instead, extracts from information developed on the schools are presented under seven different categories: pro-social conduct, clarity of purpose; appropriate consequences for good and bad conduct; well-prepared documents; staff coherence; school spirit; and academics. Each extract is identified by a ▶ before the first word. In many cases, explanatory comments are sandwiched between the extracts. The extracts represent a broad sampling of our information. However, not all schools are proportionately recognized via extracts, since questions of composition and effective presentation affected decisions about what to extract. The seven categories are not definitive. For instance, the categories of parent/school relations, or pupil discipline, might be added, or substituted for others being used. But the information presented will be clear enough for readers to consider a variety of potential—as well as actual—categories. At the end of the descriptive material is a short essay, offering reflections on the information presented.

Despite the dispersion of our information, it is important to recognize that the winning schools were usually effective in a wholistic fashion. To paraphrase Tolstoy's famous opening in *Anna Karenina*, while weak schools are each weak in their own particular ways, strong schools, despite their widely different situations, usually possessed a medley of common virtues.

Another pertinent factor is that special programs were usually not central to the goodness of our schools. And, by "programs," we mean separate activities, often maintained by extra funds. The sucessful schools typically had a diversity of activities, but most of these activities were highly integrated into the school's regular rhythms. For instance, some departmentalized schools used their pupils "homerooms" as a point of focus for many constructive activities; and most of the schools gave priority to appropriate homework. Are activities of this sort "programs"?

Winning schools stressed pupil pro-social conduct

The self-assessment forms asked participating schools to calculate the percentage of pupils who periodically engaged in various forms of pro-social conduct,e.g., crossing guards, members of teams (helping each other), or tutoring other pupils. The idea was that, just as schools know which of their pupils are assigned to math, reading, or a foreign language, so, too, should they be able to estimate their pupils' levels of pro-social activity in and around school. The levels of such activities differed among the winning schools, and were affected by many local factors. For instance, one winner estimated that, during a typical month, 95% of the pupils served as class messengers, monitors or hall guards. Another school estimated that during a typical month, 15% of its students participated in community service activities. A third school had a student council with a dedicated faculty sponsor; it estimated that a typical council member spent 200 hours a year on council activities. (One responsibility of site visitors was to determine that the data recited on the self-assessment forms were essentially correct.)

▶ The student council undertook many projects for worthwhile ends. They organzied fundraising activities, planned special days of appreciation for school employees (e.g., Secretaries' Day, Nurse's Day) helped teachers to organize field trips, and otherwise made themselves useful. (8)

Many schools have trouble making effective use of their student councils. It seems they are sometimes seen in too "political" a perspective. As a result, their assigned responsibilities are grandoise, poorly defined, and potentially intrusive. In the winning schools, the student councils were often active and accepted notable responsibilities. Still, their policies were tempered with a mix of adult realism, counsel, and, also, enthusiasm.

▶ First grade students were asked to write notes to the Easter Bunny, outlining their wishes. Fifth grade students were then invited to write responses to these notes—directed to the appropriate first graders, and signed "The Easter Bunny"—saying what they would try to do to fulfill their schoolmate's request. The notes were then delivered to the first graders, and the fifth graders later carried our their promises. (1)

▶ Each faculty member sponsors one or more clubs or teams as part of the regular school program. A high percentage of the students participate in year-round intramural sports. (9)

Site visitors frequently commented on the open and polite pupil/adult relations in the winning schools, and the ease with which pupils dealt with adults, and each other. It is likely that such desirable traits are the outcome of policies which stimulate pupils to become involved with each other, and the faculty, in activities where they work together towards socially desirable ends.

▶ The school, each year, actively encourages students to participate in a blood donor campaign. On several occasions, the school has been recognized by the national Red Cross for attaining the highest level of blood donations among all participating American high schools. (12)

▶ The school is affiliated with the national honor society. The constitution of the school's chapter provides, "Eligible candidates are rated on a scale of –1 to 4 by members of the faculty on their traits of character, leadership, and service. Four is the highest, and –1 the lowest. The candidates rating is averaged in each category. When the averages of leadership, service and character are added to the GPA (scholarship), they must total 12 or above...Any member who falls below the standards which were the basis of his selection shall be promptly warned." (16)

Winning schools often tied together elements of good character and other aspects of recognition. Conversely, popular student activities (e.g., sports, certain clubs) were often only open to students who met minimum academic standards, or followed the school discipline code. The schools assumed that "good citizenship" is not an isolated activity, but part of a wholistic pattern.

▶ Each month the school has a leadership assembly, and all students are present. A different class is responsible for planning each assembly, during which the class may present a play, musical performance, or invited speaker. In addition, one or more students (from each class) are recognized before the school for their acts of leadership or good citizenship. (6)

Musical or dramatic performances are forms of pro-social conduct. They require the presentors to practice and accept collective discipline, in order to give pleasure to others—the audience. Of course, oftentimes, performers enjoy themselves, too. But there is nothing wrong with pupils getting pleasure from doing good for others.

▶ The school has a pupil Gospel Choir, which performs at school, church and community activities and has sucessfully participated in Chicago-wide competitions. The choir has over 50 members, and rehearses regularly and diligently. To insure student members appreciated the obligations involved in membership, students applying were presented with a contract. It clearly spelled our their obligations as choir members, including arriving on time for rehearsals; displaying good conduct; and regularly attending rehearsals. The contact also specified the penalties arising from non-performance. Both the student and his parent had to sign the contract. (7)

Winning schools displayed a clarity of purpose.

Schools work with many different people: faculty members, pupils, families of pupils, and community residents. Furthermore, many persons routinely enter the universe of the school as other persons are leaving. Under these circumstances, it is especially important that the school's purposes be (a) intellec-

tually coherent, (b) clearly stated, and (c) frequently articulated and reiterated. Through such clarity and communication, all members of the school community can be stimulated to work in harmony, instead of at cross-purposes. This is not to suggest that clarity of purpose assures that a purpose can be achieved; it is simply to emphasize that no good purpose can be attained unless it is first clear. Clarity is necessary but not a sufficient condition to being a good school.

▶ The high school faculty manual described the role of the homeroom teacher in the following language: "The Homeroom Teachers are the grass roots representatives of the school administration. Because of their daily, intimate, personal contact with the students, they are the vital link required for effective communication and the formation of students. Their initiative and enthusiasm in the performance of their duties are responsible for the over-all tone and atmosphere of the school. In the homerooms, attitudes of cooperation and loyalty are developed." The manual then used a page and a half to list and discuss twelve different areas of homeroom teacher responsibilities. (15)

Obviously, some homeroom teachers may still not do what is asked of them; however, it is evident that the directions given them are clear and empathetic. Incidentally, many of the winning schools gave great emphasis to individual teachers working with persisting *groups* of pupils to attain various collective ends. Such activities were important tools for fostering social skills and good character traits in pupils. The directions to homeroom teachers are an instance of this perspective.

▶ The school is concerned about student character development. It recognized that character-related behavior, like all human behavior, is learned. It identified a number of areas of student conduct where issues of pupil behavior were involved: students' entering and leaving the building; eating in the lunchroom; fire drill activities; and conduct during student assemblies. Detailed, written analyses were developed, by a committee, describing the precise steps involved in carrying out such activities. The appropriate teacher behaviors and pupil responses were identified, and specified. The documents were destributed to all teachers, thoroughly discussed, and put into effect. (2)

Some readers may regard the approach as mechanistic. However, the site visitors were especially impressed at the high spirits and good morale evinced by all members of this school community—as well as the good discipline. The unfortunate fact is that all too often, many schools are unwilling to engage in such deliberate analysis of how to attain good pupil conduct on various occasions. One evidence of this adult inattention is the inability of many schools to regulary conduct pupil assemblies—and such assemblies are an important tool for fostering pupil learning and raising morale. Such activities are often avoided because administrators and teachers are unable to insure good pupil conduct at assemblies. And so, rather than (sucessfully) trying to change pupil conduct, too many schools cop-out, and do not hold assemblies. All of the winning schools could generally expect good conduct from students, even when they were assembled in large groups. Many of these schools attained such desirable outcomes because of deliberately maintaining clear policies regarding good conduct at assemblies.

▶ The student newspaper ran an editorial, "We are the Future." The editorial remarked that "We are dependent on our parents, teachers, and others until we are adults. They are behind us, directing us, teaching us...Even though we are guided, the youth of today are tomorrow's leaders. We will mold and construct tomorrows. It is our minds, our plans and our dreams which will make the world that is to be. Please, remember this, especially when you are making some sort of decision. After all, everything we do really does affect our future."(16)

The editorial is a strong, straightforward plea for the practise of deferred gratification—a vital element of good character. It also sympathetically and accurately describes the supportive youth/adult relations which exist in and around the school. Such descriptions help adults to constructively shape youth character, by fostering intergenerational good will.

Theoretically, *student* newspapers present solely the writing and thoughts of pupils. However, in all schools, such writings are, inevitably, partly affected by the conduct and values of the faculty surrounding the students. In particular, since student newspapers are always under some form of faculty sponsorship, the potential for adult influence is even more evident. (It is not so much a question of adult censorship, but the matter of adults providing vital, constructive counsel to young persons who are open to advice.) The materials in student newspapers can have a significant influence on students' attitudes and values. Thus, schools participating in the contest who attained the second round were requested to include copies of their student newspaper (if they had one) as part of their materials.

▶ A teacher included the following note, in clear handwriting, among the school's exhibits: "I use *frequent* notes to parents of a personalized nature relating to every manner of communication. They vary from praise of a child's sensitivity to the needs of a new student or some personal accomplishment to the need for more consistent attention to the completion of work. I also find that phone contact with a parent is extremely beneficial and has an added advantage to providing me with information." The note was written on simple note paper, which had the teacher's name printed at the bottom, plus a decorative print of a teacher writing on a blackboard. It is not evident whether the teacher personally ordered the special paper, or whether it was provided by the school. (1)

Winning schools used a variety of means to foster teacher/parent cooperation about academic learning and pro-social conduct. Good, clear communication was an important element of such

cooperation.

▶ The school had a one page school code, which was widely distributed to students and parents. It began with a preamble: "We, the students of the W.E.B. Du Bois School, have established this school code, in order that we may continue to strive toward academic excellence and proper conduct, while at the same time keeping our school attractive, orderly, and clean. We, the students of the W.E.B. Du Bois School expect each other to abide by these codes and with this in mind, we present the following..." The eight items in the code have the following titles: Respect for oneself; respect and manners for everyone; respect for school property; attendance and punctuality; good grooming and dress; refraining from obscene remarks; best schoolwork possible; and obey and adhere to school rules. (3)

Undoubtedly, faculty and administrators played an important part in developing the code. But our site visitor reports that parent help was also significant. While the language required adult draftmanship, it is also evident that most students can read and understand what the code is about. The text, although clear and thorough, is more than a mere bureaucratic formulation. Indeed, it is couched in the phraseology of important American historic documents; undoubtedly, this phraseology helps it enlist the support and sympathy of older students.

▶ The school discipline code restricts students from smoking in and around the school. The code goes into some detail as to when and where smoking is prohibited. It specifically prohibits the "open display or handling of cigarettes or any smoking material in school." (12)

To some readers, the text may seem picky. But "clarity" sometimes requires specificity. An adult reluctance to seem "picky," especially in large schools, can lead to confusion and uncertainity among faculty and pupils. In general, when the winning schools wanted to restrict some misconduct which might frequently occur, they spelled out exactly what they meant. Of course, generalities were sometimes required; not everything can be covered by explicit rules; however, if an issue arose often, reluctance to explicitly mention it is seen as a sign of weakness.

Speaking generally, clarity in school policies touches on several matters. First, there must be clarity of thought; the ability to clearly define a situation, and identify relationships. Second, one needs clarity of expression: the ability to accurately and persuasively say and write what one means. Finally, there is the matter of simple courage: for, if one speaks clearly, some people (or parents or students) may be offended; one must be willing to state things with reasonable tact, and then stand for them if and when resistance arises.

Winning school stressed appropriate consequences for students and faculty

After sound goals are articulated, significant consequences (i.e., rewards and punishments) must be provided to stimulate good conduct. Developing such consequences takes energy, imagination, and resources. Obviously the process is simpler if the school has a high level of resources, e.g., many dollars to spend on providing attractive prizes, or even economic benefits for teachers. But many of the winning schools were comparatively resource poor. Even so, they found ways of developing conspicious consequences for good and bad conduct. The key matter was their recognition that such systems were worth time and effort to develop.

▶ The principal frequently sends out a written staff bulletin. The first item in it is "Orchids to:" It lists the name of teachers who have demonstrated significant achievements in the recent past, and clearly describes the nature of such achievements. Thus, "Ms. Eloise Scott and room 211 and Ms. Ertha Campbell and room 204 [receive Orchids] for having the best attendance for the month of January—96.60% and 98.59% respectively" The Orchids section, in one typical issue, mentioned 21 different teachers and staff members by name and specified their achievements, and also listed 33 classes which had up-to-date bulletin boards (the school has about 60 teachers).(4)

Note that the praise was not generalized—doing a great job!—but particular. Someone who was doing some things wrong might still deserve praise for specific actions and other teachers, in general, could also recognize the acts which might win them praise. Articulating such precise praise requires an information system which provides administrators with frequent and clear information about teacher conduct. The proportion of teachers praised—about 35%—is also significant. A too low proportion of persons recognized creates a large pool of ignored employees who may tend to vent their frustration on the small group of "boss' pets." A too large proportion of persons praised suggest that the praise is easily won, and is thus insignificant. Thirty five percent praised for precisely described reasons seems about right. It implies that, over a year, any diligent person can attain one or more "Orchids, " and any employee who receives no praise is probably being given a message.

Incidentally, conducting such a system of "Orchids" takes some determination. Some principals face severe criticism from some non-praised staff members when they "name names"—even to deliver public praise. Some principals persevere in the face of such resistance—and others fail to try, or try and give up. The principals in the winning

schools kept it up. A word should also be said about the impact of symbolic rewards, such as public praise. Cynical readers may belittle such rewards, in contrast to material benefits—such as merit pay or raises. Of course, properly distributed raises can constitute a significant reward. However, Olympic runners undergo great stress to win public recognition, and soldiers in combat sometimes risk their lives partly to win medals. The cynic, who belittles the value of "mere" public praise, misunderstands the deep-seated human need for recognition. Indeed, the strong resentment which some teachers display towards systems of public recognition (of others) is eloquent testimony of how important such recognition really is; after all, if it were really irrelevant, why should some teachers strive so hard to prevent it occurring to others?

▶ The school newspaper conducted a survey among a number of students, to determine whether part-time jobs away from school interfered with students'school work or extra-curricular activities. The survey revealed that, in general, students employed in part-time jobs were getting better grades and engaged in more extra-curricular activities than students not holding such jobs. The newspaper published an interesting and clear article on the study. (14)

Interestingly enough, the findings from the study of these students are consistent with several much more sophisticated studies done by trained researchers. Those studies tended to show that moderate levels of out-of-school employment were generally associated with higher levels of in-school performance. Presumably, the "point" is that efficient, purposeful people get more done in less time than less organized people. Findings of this sort suggest that schools are justified in maintaining relatively high demands on students, even when they may be working on part-time jobs.

▶ The school is working hard to motivate its very mixed pool of students. The school newspaper, half-way through the year, published three different forms of recognition: the tenth week honor rolls (specifying the pupils' GPA's), the twentieth week honor roll, and the names of pupils with perfect attendance. (13)

Note that the school recognized two different systemic goals--improving academic learning, and raising attendance per se. And, to recognize achievement in both categories, separate recognition systems were established and publicized. The world being what it is, all of us—even high school students—like to see our names in paper.

▶ Each classroom, each month, was asked to designate its "best citizen." The names of these designated students were conspicuously posted outside the principal's office, near the front door of the school. By the time of the site visit, about sixty pupils' names were displayed by the door. The principal remarked, to the visitors, that the school also provided a variety of other badges, ribbons, notes to parents and other devices to stimulate constructive changes in pupils. (12)

▶ The student handbook describes the school discipline code. It includes a system of demerits, detentions, and, finally, suspension. Minor offenses (e.g., tardiness to class, walking or loitering in the halls without reason or pass) which typically warrant one demerit are specified, as well as larger offenses which automatically warrant detention (e.g., disrespect for authority). Five demerits total one detention. A student serving detention "must report to an assigned room at the assigned time and date for one hour of silent reflection or other duties as may be assigned. Students must also show their detention notice to their parents. (16)

Most of the winning schools had, at worst, only moderate discipline problems. Yet some of them dealt with pupils from disorderly environments. Probably one cause for their low level of discipline problems was the high level of rewards they maintained for pro-social conduct and academic learning; there were many other conspicuously recognized outlets for pupil energy in and around these schools. Still, none of the winners disregarded the matter of clearly prohibiting undesirable conduct, and providing significant systems of correction. They did not take pupil virtue for granted. One of the winners had an in-school suspension room, to isolate disruptive students. An administrator was asked what provisions were made to insure that too many students did not seek such a room as one way of getting away from classroom pressures. He replied, "Oh! I should have mentioned that pupils serving in-school suspension have to do their regular class assignments plus having to complete extra work. None of them see such an arrangement as fun."

▶ The school was not satisfied with its rate of pupil attendance. The student/parent handbook was revised to provide: "You are expected to be present each day that school is in session. Unexcused absence may result in the filing of a complaint with the County Truant Office and the referral to the local juvenile officer(s). When attendance is not possible due to illness or other legitimate emergency, the following procedures are to be followed..." (4)

The text is an accurate, though somewhat formalistic statement of the law. Technically it is not the student who is legally obligated, but his parent. However, as a practical matter, the statement is essentially true: if a student is absent without good cause, a legal proceeding can be brought (against the parent). And such a proceeding will have many significant consequences for the student. Obviously, a strong statement of this sort will cause many students to think carefully before engaging in casual absences; they will also ask prodding questions of their parents if they are kept at home for inappropriate reasons (e.g., to care for a younger sibling). The school is quite justified in giving this focus to attendance; of course, presence does not insure academic learning, but absence makes it impossible. Furthermore, many employers have em-

phasized the importance of regular school attendance as one measure of a job applicant's reliability; it is wise for schools to help pupils develop good attendance records.

The statement about legal consequences will inevitably obligate the school to follow through on its threat in serious situations, but our site visitors felt that this school would not make an empty threat. Incidentally, the visitors also mentioned that pupil/adult relations in this school appeared warm and open.

▶ The school included the following discussion in its self-report:

"A more current problem at the school involves the 'refinement' of girls into young ladies. Frequently, those not directly involved with schools assume that boys constitute greater discipline problems. This is not necessarily true. Girls can frequently be more devious, can get into fights, and generally cause more restlessness and insecurity in a class. At our school several programs have been undertaken to present to our girls a positive image of womanhood and to build feminine self-esteem and character.

In general, our staff attempts to treat our middle and upper grade girls as young ladies. The attitude with which each staff member and the male students treat them is very important. They are addressed as 'young ladies' and the traditions of chivalry are employed as much as possible.

The DuBois Cheerleaders are the pride of our school. Their outstanding record is testimony to the support which they are given. Our school annually holds a cheerleaders and basketball luncheon for participants and parents at which members of both teams are recognized and given individual trophies.

Finally, Ms. Ollie Sims, DuBois counselor, runs a charm class for upper grade girls. Ms. Sims is herself a model, and highly qualified to teach good grooming. In the after school class, she stresses dress, make-up, poise, good grooming, posture, etiquette and many other factors which contribute to a young lady who has pride not only in her appearance, but in her character as well.

The overall program we believe, is working. There still are the petty fights and disagreements which take place. These are dealt with in fairly stern measures, as has been the tradition at our school. But, in the case of girls, we also attempt to counsel them regarding the manner in which they are demeaning themselves. We also emphasize the contempt in which they are held by their peers, rather than allowing them to deceive themselves into believing that their peers respect them. The most critical cases are invited to join the charm class." (13)

Some commentators might question the emphasis on "chivalry" in a contemporary ghetto elementary school. But able leaders recognize the need to first meet people "where they are." For many of the female pupils in this school, success may consist in avoiding pregnancy until marriage, and organizing themselves to get through high school. The school has—properly—recognized that fostering self-respect is a critical factor to such success. At this time, some of the significant role models around these young women are the pseudo-glamorous prostitutes they pass by on the way to school. If a teacher can show them how to responsibly move towards becoming attractive—with dignity—an important constructive step has been taken. In sum, the school has approached a difficult problem in motivation through the application of imagination and adult dedication (it's unlikely that Ms. Sims is paid for her after-school work).

The documents used by winning schools help demonstrate their virtues

Many people deprecate the significance of documents and paper-work in the management of effective schools. Probably some vision of the idiocies portrayed in *Up the Down Staircase* lies at the back of their minds.

The reality is that America is a literate society. Many important communications come to all of us by means of documents. Furthermore, written communications are a vital instrument of contact and control in any organization (like a school) which is (a) comprised of more than three to six people, and (b) where the people involved do not all work together in view of each-other, and (c) where the institution must persist over many years. In other words, communication via documents is inherent in the operation of schools. It is also useful training for pupils who will live in an adult society where they have to deal with employment applications, tax forms, apartment leases and equivalent matters. The real issue is not whether schools should have documents, but whether these documents will be well-prepared and otherwise appropriate.

▶ The school's handbook for teachers, under the heading "Supervision," included the following provision: "Formal supervision is done once a year for the purpose of evaluating a specific lesson and conducting the class according to Archdiocesan policy. Informal supervision is done daily when possible for the purpose of keeping the principal aware of the general progress of the student and assisting the teacher in any way possible." (6)

The school involved has about 275 pupils. Thus, short, daily visits by the principal are usually possible. Most of the winning schools had systems of principal/teacher supervision which provided principals with good feedback on teacher conduct. In larger schools, such systems did not rely solely—or mainly—on visits by the principal. Oftentimes, various forms of agency were applied (e.g., visits by the department chairs). Also, principals always supplemented visits with indirect forms of collecting information (e.g., observing teacher conduct in other contexts, examining samples of student work). Whatever the system(s) applied, the winning schools were comparatively straightforward about them. It is also significant—and typical—that the handbook quoted mentions supervision (which may have negative

connotations) and *helping* individual teachers and generally monitoring instruction. To present classroom visits in a largely negative perspective is both harmful, and objectively wrong.

▶ The school enrolls only uniquely handicapped students. It has designed a special report to improve its communications with parents. The card contains 19 different items, although many students will not be engaged in all of these forms of activities. About 60% of the items specify vocationally-related activities, such as: warehouse, clerical, laundry, and self-care. A four letter grade code, including "'O,' does not apply," is also recited on the card. The card comes with a "supplement," which invites the teacher to add his own comments unique to the student. The phone number for follow-up questions is listed on the face of the card. The card also has provisions for a parent's signature. (11)

Obviously, clear systems of reporting to parents are important to schools trying to improve student academic and character learning. The particular types of "cards" appropriate to this end vary, according to pupil grade level, and other circumstances. Still, the card structure used in any school must be subject to deliberate and periodic examintion, to see whether it is consistent with changing circumstances.

▶ The high school serves a low income community. Many of the pupils' parents have had little experience with college decisions. An issue of the principal's periodic newsletter to parents included a clear and informative discussion about the process of college decision-making. The discussion covered matters such as preparing for the SAT, collecting information, visiting campuses, pursuing scholarships, approximate schedules to follow, and how parents can help. (13)

▶ The student handbook contained the following instructions regarding school lunch:

Wholesome, balanced meals may be purchased by students on a weekly basis. Good manners are expected and required. Remember to:

1. Use a conversational tone when talking.
2. Remain in your seat while eating.
3. Take the time to enjoy your food.
4. Clear the area when you have finished your meal.

Demonstrated disregard for lunchroom rules will result in immediate disciplinary action. (9)

As mentioned earlier, one test of a good school is whether it can assemble its students into large gatherings and expect good order. The fact that clear, appropriate instructions about lunchroom conduct are written and distributed to students does not insure that the instructions will be monitored by faculty, or carried out by students. But, in an institution encompassing 500 people, if instructions are not written and distributed, it's quite likely there will be disorder.

▶ School information booklets distributed to parents and other interested citizens provide the following statistics about the students' performance on the standardized tests administered in the school last year: (2)

STANFORD ACHIEVEMENT TESTS

READING STANINE GROUPINGS BY PERCENTAGE IN EACH GROUP

GRADE LEVEL	Below Avg. Stanines 1-2-3	Average Stanines 4-5-6	Above Avg. Stanines 7-8-9	At or above the 4th Stanine
	National Average 23%	National Average 54%	National Average 23%	National Average 77%
	5/81	5/81	5/81	5/81
1	6%	33%	61%	94%
2	7%	32%	61%	93%
3	7%	45%	48%	93%
4	4%	71%	25%	96%
5	2%	71%	27%	98%
6	4%	70%	26%	96%

MATH STANINE GROUPINGS BY PERCENTAGE IN EACH GROUP

GRADE LEVEL	Below Avg. Stanines 1-2-3	Average Stanines 4-5-6	Above Avg. Stanines 7-8-9	At or above the 4th Stanine
	National Average 23%	National Average 54%	National Average 23%	National Average 77%
	5/81	5/81	5/81	5/81
1	15%	55%	30%	85%
2	17%	34%	49%	83%
3	4%	36%	60%	96%
4	10%	69%	21%	90%
5	0%	64%	36%	100%
6	12%	62%	26%	88%

Some other winning schools provided parents with information of comparable scope. Probably, most parents are not technically qualified to completely assess results presented in such detail. And, ironically, experts would perhaps feel that the information presented was not complete enough to permit adequate interpretation. Still, the presentation of the statistics naturally invites other exchanges with parents regarding the school's academic program. Furthermore, the presentation will encourage parents to expect to see such information regularly brought up-to-date. In other words, such reports make it likely the staff will be kept on their toes regarding student test performance.

▶ Before the beginning of the school year, teachers receive an opening bulletin from the administration. The bulletin is in addition to a school policies book, which each teacher has already received. The bulletin includes (a) the agenda for the first, pre-opening, faculty meeting, which included ten headings—one heading "General Announcements" contained seventeen specified items, (b) a detailed schedule of the first day of school, including about twenty separate different responsibilities to be handled by classroom teachers in the first half-day, and (c) a section called "General Information," with twelve headings and numerous subheads. To show the nature of the text, consider the first day instructions for non-classroom teachers (e.g., reading instructors) under the heading "Ancillary Staff," in the section titled "General Information."

1. Registration Committee (Auditorium—Main Building)

a. Mrs. Bynum, Mr. Kennedy, Miss Liddy, Ms. Pasen, and Ms. Wilson register new students.
b. Send Special Education students to Mr. Kennedy.
c. Mrs. Wackrow will assist students who do not know where to report. (Use class lists and alpha lists.) Assign new students to rooms.
d. Mrs. McGuire—Transfers out
e. Allot registration numbers—J. Smith, L. Clark.

2. Hall Duty
   a. Main Building:
      1. Basement—Ms. Blank
      2. Front—Mr. Wilson
   b. Modular building
      1. 1st foor—front door—Mrs. Clark
      2. Back door—Mrs. Ennis (4)

This is a large school. Unless things are well planned and clearly communicated to all concerned, chaos will break out. Despite the focus on organization which underlies the instruction, site visitors found the human relations in the school warm and straightforward. One might plausibly make the case that some American elementary schools are much too large—or, at least, are far larger than those found in other industrial countries. One could also note that large schools make noteworthy organizational demands on their staffs. It is evident that this school meets such demands. But it may be unwise to create or to maintain institutions which require such extraordinary levels of excellence in their managers. The research suggests that, all too often, such large schools end up with ordinary managers, who are either too managerial, or not managerial enough.

Winning schools displayed high levels of staff coherence

The administration and faculty in winning schools worked closely together. Each staff member generally expected that they could rely on their associates to do the right things without prodding, or close supervision. On the other hand, staff members looked on supervisors and their peers as supportive, and had little reluctance to seek help or advice. They did not regard the visits of supervisors as threats, but more occasions to exchange views, or seek help. In sum, there were frequent and close contacts among staff members, and these contacts were usually easy, and often work-related. Many of the winning schools had unusually high levels of staff stability (average lengths of ten years in the school were not uncommon). Of course, stability alone does not guarantee quality; but, with good people, stability makes higher quality possible; furthermore, if a school is excellent, teachers want to keep working there.

▶ The school works with students having special learning problems. The site visitor reported that it had adopted the following procedure to insure the various subject areas integrated the materials they presented to students: "Representative teachers from each of the four content areas (choosen on a rotating basis) meet weekly with each other to disuss accomplishments and future objectives in each area. This, in addition to periodic group reviews of each pupil's individual education as required by federal law, constitutes quite a bit of teacher staffing time." (11)

▶ The site visitors reports include the following information:

The teachers' lounge is nicely maintained. One of its bulletin boards contained a variety of notices which listed about fifteen different non-teaching responsibilities handled by different teachers (e.g., directing cheerleaders, student council, reading coordinators for different groups of classes), plus the names of the teachers assigned.

One notice specified the name of each teacher who had agreed to introduce a regular staff meeting with an appropriate religious reading, poem, or other such material. Still another specified the nights which various teachers were scheduled to attend school board meetings, to meet their responsibility of attending one such meeting a year.

The school had a racially mixed staff, and the principal (who is white, and new this year) felt that there had been some tension to overcome. Steps have been taken at both a social and administrative level to handle this. Each monthly staff meeting is accompanied by a staff lunch (with homemade cake, etc.), prepared by various members of the faculty. Also, each month, some occasion or other for a party developed. In March, the Irish faculty members (in the all black student school) threw a St. Patrick's Day party for the faculty, with soda bread, and Irish coffee. The previous month, the black faculty had an affair celebrating Black History month. (7)

▶ The school works with emotionally disturbed children, who live in a nearby mental hospital. Close communication between the teachers and the hospital staff is essential, so they can coordinate their teaching and treatment of patients. A system of weekly and monthly meeting was established. In addition, each patient-student was provided with a written pass to bring to and from class each day. Teachers and hospital staff are instructed to read each pass when admitting the student (to either class or back to the hospital), and to make notes on the pass (out of sight of the patient) each time they "exit" a patient. The system was developed to encourage a daily flow of information about each patient between the two staffs. (10)

▶ The annually revised teachers' handbook contained the following schedule for school staff meetings:

Faculty, teacher committees and grade level planning meetings will be held throughout the school year. The basic scheduling will be as follows:

Faculty Meetings	1st Thursday (Whole school)	3:10 Library
	2nd Thursday (Intermediate grades)	3:10 Library
	3rd Thursday (Primary grades)	3:10 Library
Grade Level Meetings (bi-monthly)	Monday 1st & 3rd	Time & place to be arranged by level

Committee Meetings (bi-monthly)	Monday 2nd & 4th	Time & place to be arranged by committee
Teacher Aides (bi-monthly)	Thursday Room 1st & 3rd	2:30 Faculty

TEACHER ASSOCIATION: Local teacher association meetings will be held when called by the association. Every effort will be made to accommodate these meetings.

(Another page in the handbook specified the purposes of grade level meetings, how an agenda was to be developed, how the administration was to be kept informed, and provided that the chair of such meetings should rotate among the faculty at each grade level.) (2)

The point is quite simple: togetherness does not just happen—at least in most schools; it takes planning and determination by concerned adults. In some cases, such meeting arrangements may take time from instruction; but, if the meetings are well constructed and managed, we can expect that the quality of instruction will rise. Furthermore, even where uncompensated meeting time is voluntarily given by the staff (and this occurs in some cases), the staff, in the end, often finds itself repaid by working in a much more pleasant environment, where their commitment is supported and admired. In any case, the winning schools were not staffed by clock-watchers.

Winning schools displayed high levels of school spirit

The spirit which was conspicuous in the winning schools encompassed both pupils and faculty. It signified that members of the school community enjoyed their school and were proud to be associated with it. The existence of this spirit created a form of "lubrication," which simplified many other potentially difficult matters. Of course, school spirit is helped by winning athletic teams. However, good administrators, and able teachers, knew how to organize things so their levels of spirit were grounded on more secure bases. It's not that they were opposed to winning teams. However, a medley of spirit-building devices were used to insure that in-school community was not merely left to chance.

▶ The school has 85 white/15 black student body. It has conducted a number of activities designed to encourage student racial integration. The site visitor observed that "there was a high degree of racial integration in the lunchroom; there were only a few tables which were strictly black, and many were racially mixed." (12)

▶ In Catholic schools prayer was frequently used as a means of expressing group concern with diverse problems. In one such school, the induction of the student council members was marked by a special mass. Among the petitions recited by the participants at the mass were the following:

For the volleyball team, and their coach, that they will have a season filled with victories and good time. We pray to the Lord.

For all our sick parent, relations, and friends, especially for the mother of Margaret Stepien. We pray to the Lord.

For Sister Daviana, that she will enjoy eternal happiness. We pray to the Lord. (16)

▶ Secular schools, too, found ways of bringing members of the school community into each other's concerns. A regular bulletin to parents from one school included the following information: "When Rudy Vogel, a teacher who is about to retire, went to attend the December 21st assembly, he thought he was going to a Christmas program. He was surprised and very touched to see the beautiful program which the students had practiced secretly to perform in his honor. His family had also been invited to attend, and all were moved by the speeches and the songs prepared to honor him. Mr. William Smith, the principal, presented Rudy with a plaque commemorating his service. Mr. Vogel's speech of thanksgiving expressed his deep feelings as he responded to the applause of students and staff members." (11)

▶ Deliberate and planned efforts were made to insure that the human concerns of staffs and students were not ignored. Social committees, composed of teacher representatives (but supported by the administration) were common, and usually active. At least one school had elaborate guidelines for its social committee. The guidelines defined the person affected by the committee (administrators, teachers, clerks, and aides), the annual dues, the records to be maintained, the types of occasions where gifts (or other forms of recognition) were appropriate, the typical expenses for each occasion, and the social activities regularly sponsored by the fund, i.e., a Christmas Party, and an end of the year party. (3)

▶ Many different occasions can be used to enhance a school's level of community. One school had an extremely active student council. To insure that no students felt totally left out on Valentines Day, the council undertook the responsibility of sending one Valentine to each student. (8)

▶ According to the site visitor, one school developed an original approach to improving student/student relations:

"Many classrooms in the school are multi-aged. There are classrooms that included first, second, and third graders. There were classrooms with first and second graders, and ones with fourth and fifth graders. The faculty is committed to this approach not only as a good way to promote academic learning, but as a wonderful way to improve school atmosphere. They firmly believe that when the oldest group in a building associates with only their age group in the classroom, an elitist mentality develops that is detrimental to the general school atmosphere. This year, and in the past, they have experienced the most discipline problems in the one classroom made up exclusively of fifth graders. Although the multi-age group takes considerable teacher commitment and continued parent support, the faculty is willing to take this challenge." (1)

▶ Sometimes, administrators and faculty make frank and direct appeals to student pride. The following is from a student handbook:

Dear Student,

Hello! You have been lucky enough to be scheduled to come to Nathan Hale Middle School. Hale Middle is by far the best middle school in the U.S.A.

I know you are looking forward to starting your 1982-1983 school year, and we are looking forward to having you.

Hale Middle School students are the best behaved, most energetic, most school spirit minded, most studious students in the entire district.

Hale Middle School will reach new heights of excellence this year, with the cooperation of each and everyone of you.

Give it your best shot, think excellence, and welcome to Nathan Hale Middle School. (9)

Of course, whether any particular school is "the best" is debatable. Still, it is unlikely that anyone can be the best unless they want to attain such a goal. And, if some institution is trying to be the best in the U.S.A., it may at least become the best in its area...or what have you. Anyway, if a school wants to be the best, it is obviously justified in making strong demands of its pupils—and asking them to be proud of what's around them.

▶ We must recognize the ultimate effects of good school spirit. It is a sense that "we're in this together, and we hold common expectations and regard for each other." Such spirit is a form of ultimate cement. This cement permits a school to work when things happen which just can't be covered by rules and written procedures. One site visitor reported the following which illustrates this point: "Several of the school's classes are specially designated for special education students. On the day of my visit, these students were not in the school; they were at Great Park, participating in the Special Olympics. Because there will be a late evening awards dinner and ceremony, the school's students would have to miss the ceremony because of their long bus ride home. The special education teachers raised enough money to permit them and the kids to stay at the Conrad Hilton Hotel overnight and return to school the next morning. I believe this is what the kids meant when they told me their teachers care about them." (3)

It should be recognized that the schools used a variety of spirit building techniques not specifically portrayed here: assemblies, in-class parties (with provisions for clean up, and other necessary restriction), inter- and intramural athletics, numerous contests, bulletins to students and staff, mascots, Black History activities, silly clothes days, and student/faculty basketball games. Intertwined through all of these occasions were the interrelated themes of having fun and, at the same time, conducting oneself in a responsible fashion.

Winning schools give priority to academic learning

The matter of formal academic learning can be tricky in a character-oriented school. In many American schools, the stimulation of academic learning is associated with a form of devil-take-the-hindmost competition. Some few students do well under such demands, but many others are either inherently inadept, or are alienated by the highly divisive nature of this process. As a result, research has demonstrated that, in many schools, high proportions of students actively disassociate themselves from the formal academic life of the school. They don't necessarily dislike school, but they don't invest much of themselves in the pursuit of adult-established academic goals.

Character-oriented schools strive to enlist all their students in the concerns of the school, broadly encouraging pro-social conduct, stimulating school spirit, and otherwise establishing a medley of goals. Due to this breadth of purpose, students find themselves generally pursuing adult-organized concerns. Against this backdrop, some educators may succumb to the temptation to set aside the pursuit of academic excellence, as too divisive a purpose. After all, every student can practice pro-social conduct, or be affected by school spirit; but many of them will—realistically speaking—be inadept at learning algebra, or a foreign language.

The winning schools resisted this temptation to cop-out. They concluded that there was nothing inconsistent with stimulating togetherness, on one hand, and recognizing the variety of human cognitive diversity on the other. And one part of such diversity is the different learning abilities possessed by pupils. The winning schools made strenuous efforts to insure that all students learned certain basic skills, but the schools did not stop there. They simultaneously encouraged their more adept students to press on as high as they were able. And enormous range of techniques were applied to attain this end.

▶ Homework was emphasized. Students, teachers and parents were given common expectations via written, and widely circulated, documents. One school's policies were stated as follows:

"Assignments of homework should be given daily by all teachers and should complement the daily lesson. Teachers are to give definite assignments in each subject each night to each class. In assigning work, whether written or study, teachers should keep in mind that the student is expected to do a minimum of two hours of homework each night." (15)

▶ Deliberate attention was given to matters such as honor rolls, honor societies, the criteria for listing and membership and the like. One school conducted an annual scholarship convocation with an outside speaker, a published program, and the listing of the various awardees (by category) in the program. Seven categories of honors were specified. When a team of students from this school placed first in a national contest for groups of pre-engineering students, the team members were lauded throughout the school, and extensive publicity was stimulated in the community. (13)

▶ Another school included that following information in the routine bulletin to faculty:

Some interesting statistics:

"A" honor roll for semester—Seniors: 6% of class total, "B" honor roll: 16%

"A" honor roll for semester—Juniors: 4% of class total, "B" honor roll: 17%

"A" honor roll for semester—Sophomores: 3% of class total; "B" honor roll: 23%

"A" honor roll for semester—Freshman: 2% of class total; "B" honor roll: 17%

Honor students and the National Honor Society candidates will be recognized at the Parent's club meeting on next Thursday evening. Faculty attendance is welcomed and encouraged to support this worthwhile activity. (15)

▶ Where students needed help to improve their test taking skills, deliberate programs were organized to deal with this problem. One site visitor reported: "We visited each classroom. The total class stood up when we entered and warmly greeted Sister and then, when I was introduced, they greeted me. Sister was able to ask all the students questions regarding their current work and all the students answered in complete sentences and were very proud of their accomplishments. Second and 3rd graders explained to me what their Iowa Tests of Basic Skills scores meant. They were planning, with their teachers, what they would be doing to increase their scored where needed." (6)

▶ Principals emphasized to teachers the importance of academic work. One principal issued the following instructions to teachers:

Forms of student papers

Teachers:

Periodically you will be asked to send sets of papers representing various discipline to the office, along with you lesson plan books.

Student's growth and maturation should be evident as the school year progresses. It would be beneficial to place these samples of student work in a folder for use during parent conferences and to display during Open House.

A common format for various types of papers will not only promote neatness and ease grading papers, but will cause less confusion among students, who may work with several teachers during the school year.

The guidelines presented below should be followed... (4)

▶ Oftentimes, original approaches were used. to stimulate students to develop a variety of skills. One school asked pairs of younger students to conduct structured interviews of specified teachers and produce written reports. The contents of one typical report ran as follows:

Teacher: Mr. Barthel
Interviewed by: Sharon Lindbong and Amy Karasek
Birthplace: Chicago, Illinois
Current home: Arlington, Illinois
Places taught: Schaumburg, Illinois
Favorite childhood memory: Hitting a homerun over the fence at Belding field.
First Job: Office boy at insurance company.
Favorite food: Graham crackers.
Personal heroes: Charles Lindberg
The one thing I can't stand in people: Insincerity.
If I couldn't be a teacher, I'd love to be a: Forest ranger.
Something I still want to do: Play the piano. (1)

▶ The academic work of students was monitored, and they were encouraged to apply themselves. A site visitor quoted a high school principal as follows:

"We scheduled our students for next year's classes a few weeks ago. It seems the students having problems with Algebra I have not signed up for Geometry. They feel it will be too hard, and fear they will not do well. Yet, the students need the subject for development of logical thinking. It is also background material for the ACT tests that they will take as Juniors. Pursuing easy courses seems to be the trend for high school students today. We will go back over the classes students have chosen, check the students' standardized test scores, call their parents, and try and advise the students into the Geometry we think will be helpful to them. (16)

Conclusion: Moving towards excellence

It is appropriate to honor excellence. But there is a limitation to such a process. One can see that something is excellent. However, it is not always easy for us—the non-excellent—to see how we can move from the mundane to the excellent. How does one go about creating environments where adults take risks, strive, care, plan, and make significant demands on pupils and each other?

Ironically, descriptions of excellent schools, themselves, do not always show how they got to where they are. These schools are, in effect, the end-products of a process of maturation. Most of them have been excellent for some time. Indeed, their excellence has been previously recognized. This prior recognition was indirect: it was not the schools which were recognized, but the excellent personnel, via awards given to their teachers (e.g., Maremont Fellowships) or principals (e.g., recognition from the Citizens' School Committee). The For Character program is the first Chicago area *school award* system. Our award decisions were not made with knowledge of these previous recognitions; but it is not surprising that schools whose staffs have won individual recognitions are also excellent schools. Thus, we come to a problem: assuming we can identify matured excellence, how do we "cultivate" a school so it attains such ripeness?

There's an anecdote which illustrates this matter. In Arthur Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman, the ne'er-do-well-to-do protagonist, has a shadowy brother, who has "made it." Willy, in one of his fantasies, sees an image of his brother. He asks the image, "How did you do it?" The image

replies, "When I was 21, I went off into the African jungles. One year later, when I came back, I was rich!" Obviously, the image is saying that, at some stage, the brother took a great risk, and succeeded. But we have no idea of how he chose his particular risk, what he did to handle the dangers which arose, and how critical mistakes were avoided. Willy envies his brother's wealth and evident determination. The problem is, he can't figure out how to get from here to there.

Fortunately, in the case of our excellent schools we are provided with more information than the image gave to Willy. Our information is not meticuously spelled out, and must be adapted to diverse local situations. Still, it is there if we apply ourselves. After all, one of the main points of Miller's play was not that Willy was uninformed. Instead, the scene meant that Willy didn't really want the details about his brother's success; even with these details, Willy didn't have his brother's determination.

And so a first component of significant school improvement efforts is a determination to make things better—out of pride, ambition, or for the love of children. We also need to recognize that higher funding is not a principal ingredient. Extra money is useful to have around, but rarely essential. By the time we have carried out all the improvements that can be done without it, we'll have come a long way. We must also keep in mind the "rule of thirds." That rule comes into play when an effective new principal comes to a school (assuming it was not previously an excellent school), and wants to improve the school. The rule says that, in general, one third of the teachers will support the new principal, one third will be neutral, but can be won over, and one third will stay opposed and should be persuaded or caused to leave. The rule implies that winning significant staff support is usually possible; however, it takes persistance, good listening and persuading, and determination.

Excellent schools are team efforts, and leaders of such schools are both leaders and team players. They look for and find support—among their teachers, their parents, their superiors, and, sometimes, their students (depending on their age). Mobilizing such support takes time, and the judicious selection of issues. The principal must warrant confidence, and appropriately give it to others. The intellectual element of school improvement is also critical. Key ideas and themes peculiar to the situation must be identified: the creation of a staff welfare committee; tightening up on teacher supervision; using reading scores to monitor student progress; or controlling student disorder in the lunchroom. Plans must be developed (with the help of others) to implement corrective measures. Usually, the plans must be clearly and persuasively stated on paper. They must be put into effect, and their operation monitored. When necessary, the plans must be changed to allow for unforseen problems. And so on. Simultaneously, successful individual plans must gradually be integrated into a wholistic operating scheme.

While constructive changes are underway, a mass of day-to-day firefighting must go on: handling disruptive pupils; finding reliable substitute teachers; carrying our paperwork; insuring that the duplicating machine is fixed; or attending to community activities. If any principal (or teacher) wants to escape the major challenges before him, the demands of such firefighting provide numerous plausible excuses. And many of these demands are not make-work. They are the bread and butter elements of the job, and provide principals with important feedback about how well their schools are running. Unfortunately, all too often they are used to avoid the elements of analysis, engagement, and confrontation inherent in moving towards school excellence.

Willy Loman concluded that his brother became wealthy because he went into the African jungles. Willy's conclusion provided an excuse for his own deficiencies: he could not imagine himself going off to Africa. But for all of us—administrators, teachers, parents—the award program has brought to light sites of educational excellence that are not in Africa, but all around us. Their excellence has been achieved by working with the same students, personnel, and dollars that we have. These achievements are an inspiration and a challenge. Let us try and make good use of them.

FOR CHARACTER, CHICAGO

Our Background

We were started by some Chicago-area subscribers to *Character II,* a national newsletter about the public and private policies which shape the character of young Americans. The newsletter has a Statement of Purpose which generally articulates some of our main concerns. That Statement declares:

> All persisting human societies have made great efforts to ensure that their children and adolescents — the future of the society — are trained to support their central values. As Plato said, over two thousand years ago, "training and education are what the overseers of the city must watch, and take care that they are not corrupted insensibly. They must guard them beyond everything...."
>
> In our democratic society, the word "character" is often used to describe traits that relate to America's central values. These traits include persistence, tact, self-reliance, generosity, and loyalty. There are many signs that America is becoming less effective in transmitting such traits to its children. This is understandable. A large, dynamic, materialistic, and prosperous society may not be an ideal environment for developing these traits. Indeed, a significant number of both social scientists and laypeople have concluded that we are failing to give adequate attention to the many forces destructively affecting character formation in our young.
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> *Character II* believes that (1) America's traditions and values are worthy of protection and preservation; (2) they are endangered because many public policies — and the attitudes underlying those policies — have created harmful elements in the social and institutional environments that surround our children and adolescents; (3) there is much that can — and should — be done to remedy the situation; and (4) academics, educators, youth workers, clergy and parents should strive to identify the causes of our youth character problems and foster appropriate solutions.

We organized and conducted our school recognition program to help carry out the principles of the Statement.

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